



Domestic Violence Initiative

Starting in July 2006, the Department established a statewide, full time network of expert consultants to address the prevalence of domestic violence. This initiative consists of 13 domestic violence consultants embedded within each Area Office throughout the state and overseen by the Statewide Service Administrator. The Statewide Service Administrator is responsible for providing the consultants with a best practice model, overseeing the statewide effectiveness of the initiative and developing a data collection system to evaluate the initiative. The Statewide Service Administrator also consults with Area and Central Office managers on policy and practice issues.

With the social work staff as their client, the consultants' mission is to help the Department better identify if domestic violence is a factor in a case and enhance the Department's response to safety and risk factors when domestic violence is identified. The Statewide Service Administrator guides the consultants in connecting their domestic violence expertise to the child welfare mission and social work practice.

The *Safe and Together* consultation model, developed specifically for domestic violence cases involving children, is used by the consultants to address the entire family. The consultants help the social work staff identify the impact of the domestic violence on children and develop plans that a) intervene with the domestic violence perpetrator, b) create the most effective partnership possible with the protective parent, c) meet the needs of the children in the home and d) are sensitive to the role of mental health issues, substance abuse and culture. Whenever possible, the consultants work to support the maintenance of the children safe and together with the domestic violence survivor.

The model centers on five critical building blocks to improve case practice and decision making in domestic violence cases. With the goal of safety, permanency and well-being of children at its core, the model is guided by the following concepts: 1) batterers' behavior needs to be clearly identified and documented in order to make good decisions regarding risk and safety, 2) safe and together with the non-offending parent is ideal from the perspective of children exposed to batterers' behavior, and 3) that children have the potential for the best outcomes when the Department can actively partner with non-offending parents.

These components need to be clearly understood, articulated and documented in order to make good decisions regarding the safety and well-being of children. It is believed

that highlighting these critical elements will improve basic social work competencies including but not limited to: interviewing, documentation, case planning and the development of solid neglect petitions.

The consultants focus on the following case dynamics:

The batterer's pattern of coercive control

By using a definition of coercive control which encompasses violence, intimidation, isolation and control, workers are provided with an improved tool to identify, assess and work with families. This definition directs workers towards the identification of behaviors associated with financial control, isolation from family and friends, sabotage of work/education, limit access to mental health/medical providers as well as threats, intimidation and physical and sexual violence. A focus on coercive control increases the likelihood that workers will see indicators of domestic violence when the case presents initially with other issues and helps them better partner with the survivor in creating effective plans. This lends itself to more comprehensive assessments and helps distinguish isolated incidents of physical violence from potentially more dangerous patterns of ongoing abuse.

Specific actions the batterer has taken to harm the children

Identifying the following behaviors will enhance worker's ability to assess the batterer's impact on the children:

- a) the batterer's use of children as weapons against the other parent
- b) the ways the batterer may have undermined or interfered with their partner's parenting
- c) the batterer's own abuse and neglect of the children
- d) the ways the batterer's behavior has undermined the normalcy and stability of the children

Clearly describing the batterer's behavior pattern as it relates to the survivor and the children improves the ability of the social work staff to interview, assess risk and safety, develop treatment plans and make solid case decisions relative to disposition, reunification and Juvenile Court intervention. Case Substantiations are less likely to be overturned and neglect petitions are more likely to be successful when a worker can describe the specific behaviors a batterer has engaged in to harm the children.

Conceptualizing the batterer's role in a family, even when he is no longer in the home, is essential to being able to understand and contextualize the decision making of the non-offending parent, validate her experience and partner with her to address ongoing risk and safety factors.

The full spectrum of the survivor's efforts to support the safety and well-being of the children

Workers are required to clearly articulate the full spectrum of the survivor's efforts to promote the safety and well-being of the children in the home. Child welfare social workers have often limited the exploration of the survivor's efforts around safety to

whether she had called the police, separated from the perpetrator and/or pursued a civil restraining order. Experience has shown this to be an extremely limited and inadequate yardstick for measuring the protective capacity of a non-offending parent. It often fails to capture the day to day strengths and commitments of survivors to keep children physically safe, in school and leading as normal a life as possible despite the abusive and neglectful behavior of the batterer.

Seeking out information about the full spectrum of the survivor's efforts to promote the safety and well-being of the children guides the social worker to ask meaningful questions about strengths and provides a framework for validating the survivor's efforts as well as helping the social worker craft a more realistic safety plan. By helping the social worker identify how the survivor has been actively working towards the safety and well being of her children, the consultant can help create a more powerful partnership between the social worker and the non-offending parent. This partnership, based on an acknowledgment of the survivor's strengths while still grounded in the reality of the batterer's behavior patterns, offers the best chance for successful outcomes for the children.

Adverse impact on children

This element helps focus the worker on identifying and documenting the impact of the batterer's actions on the children in the home. Sometimes this impact is obvious (physical injuries) but in the overwhelming majority of these cases, the impact is often psychological and emotional in nature. Interviewing strategies are identified by the consultant to promote better identification of adverse impact and how many of the problems children experience may be directly correlated to the domestic violence. In doing so, this provides a solid rationale for substantiations, increases documentation for neglect petitions and targets service delivery for children and families based on their individual needs.

The role of substance abuse, mental health issues, culture and other socio-economic factors

Batterers' behaviors are not caused by substance abuse or mental health issues. However, in many families experiencing domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health issues co-occur. Traumatized adult and child victims may present with various mental health issues or begin to self medicate with substances to deal with the emotions associated with the trauma of the abuse. Batterers often manipulate survivors' mental health conditions or substance use to increase their power and to gain influence with systems like DCF. The domestic violence consultants help the social work staff connect the dots between substance abuse, mental health issues and domestic violence.

Similarly, domestic violence occurs at very similar rates regardless of income, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The domestic violence consultants help workers develop case plans that address the intersection of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, income, education, domestic violence and safety and the well being of children.

The domestic violence consultants have fully integrated into the Area Offices. From January to December 2008, the consultants engaged in 7233 consultation activities and regularly participate in area office and case specific meetings. This statistic includes cases where domestic violence was already identified and participation in case conferences for the purposes of helping screen for indicators of domestic violence. Their involvement in a case frequently begins during the investigation. In addition to case specific work, the consultants have delivered staff development training for DCF staff as well as the Department's community partners. From January to December 2008, more than 91 training sessions were delivered to over 2101 DCF staff and community provider staff. These trainings covered a variety of topics including the **Safe and Together** model, the new domestic violence investigations protocol, engaging batterers and safety planning.

In 2008 and early 2009, the following accomplishments have occurred across the state:

- Initial and on-going training for all the domestic violence consultants. The Statewide Service Administrator continues to provide initial training for new consultants hired as the result of turnover in a few of the positions. On-going training topics have included trauma exposure reaction, curricula for working with batterers as parents, dangerous and lethality assessment,
- Domestic violence consultants remain highly integrated into day to day social work practice. In addition to regular participate in home visits, investigations, and treatment planning, at least one of the domestic violence consultants has been invited to participate in regular meetings regarding identified substance abuse cases to help with co-occurring issues of domestic violence. Six of the domestic violence consultants are actively involved in the hub teams in the offices which have the new Integrated Family Violence Services program.
- The Statewide Service Administrator has been involved in the development a batterer assessment credentialing process that will help improve the number and quality of assessments of batterers as parents available to the Department. The credentialing process outlines the background and experience of any who will provide batterer assessments along with specific criteria for the assessments themselves. The Statewide Service Administrator will also be involved in the evaluation of candidates for the credential.
- Continuous review of the implementation of the new domestic violence investigation protocol designed to improve screening and assessment capabilities for domestic violence. The Statewide Service Administrator developed a review protocol to assess the utilization of the protocol. The Area Office domestic violence consultants were expected to review a certain percentages of cases for factors associated with the implementation of the protocol such interview practices, documentation and intervention with batterers. The Statewide Service

Administrator expected each of the consultants to develop a plan to support improvements in the utilization of the protocol and work with AO staff to implement this plan. The Statewide Service Administrator met with Quality Improvement and Investigations Program Supervisors to discuss this implementation of the protocol and associated review.

- The Statewide Service Administrator has continued to support the implementation of the Integrated Family Violence Services program by providing technical assistance to each of the hubs. This has involved providing a staff person with trauma, domestic violence and child welfare experience to visit all the hubs, provide feedback on their processes, review assessments and host regular meetings of the providers and other hub members. This has also included providing additional training by outside experts on dyadic work with parents and children impacted by domestic violence and working with batterers as parents. The Statewide Service Administrator has also provided training on batterers as parents. These activities have been highly coordinated with the child welfare bureau.
 - Continuous collaboration with Hotline around domestic violence policy and practice.
 - Coordination with the Department's Legal Division to clarify communication with law enforcement in domestic violence cases.
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- Continuing involvement in Juvenile Court Improvement Plan to improve court's response to domestic violence. The Statewide Service Administrator is working with the Juvenile Court team to improve the court's response to domestic violence in child abuse and neglect filings. This has involved participating in the development of request for proposals for the development of domestic violence training curriculum and guidebook targeted to Juvenile Court stakeholders.
 - Outreach to the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence for the purposes of improving the collaborative relationship between the Department and the domestic violence community. This collaboration has led to a survey of domestic violence advocates about their positive and negative experiences with clients' involvement with the Department and a draft of a presentation for domestic violence advocates on Department policies and practices related to domestic violence.
 - Collaboration with Division of Multi-Cultural Affairs and other DCF initiatives. The Division meets regularly with the consultants to provide consultation and support around cultural competency issues. The Statewide Service Administrator has also facilitated connections between the consultants and the family conferencing initiative, DCF medical staff and the Area Resource Groups.
 - Continued close coordination with the Training Academy. This involves continued participation by the domestic violence consultants in Domestic Day I

DV pre-service training, jointly delivered with Training Academy staff. The Training Academy has also participated in the development of the CCADV training for domestic violence advocates. The Training Academy has also provided logistical support for larger events including a half day conference by David Adams, the co-founder of Emerge and national batterer intervention expert.

- The Statewide Service Administrator, in coordination with the Training Academy, developed and delivered a training entitled "Supervising Domestic Violence Cases," targeted primarily to supervisors and program supervisors. The training which was provided in a number of Area Offices and at the Training Academy provided an overview of the Safe and Together model and specific strategies for improving supervision of workers for cases involving domestic violence.
- Continued publication of domestic violence newsletter (Domestic Violence Matters), which is providing Department staff with information relevant to working with families experiencing domestic violence.
- Domestic violence interdisciplinary training series. Beginning with training on the intersection of child welfare, domestic violence and family court, the Statewide Service Administrator continues to bring in national experts to present critical information to encourage and facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration and communication. The January 2009 presentation by David Adams was attended by DCF staff, Court Support Services Division providers and staff, domestic violence victim advocates, Integrated Family Violence Service providers and fatherhood program staff.
- Raising the issue of trauma exposure reaction as it relates to the impact of domestic violence and other forms of violence on the domestic violence consultants and DCF staff. This has involved provide key partners in and outside the agency with copies of Trauma Stewardship by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky which has prompted significant discussion related to staff burnout and related issues.
- In addition to biweekly supervision and monthly meeting with the entire consultant staff, the Statewide Service Administrator has provided individualized supervision and mentorship to a number of the consultants. This has involved inviting them to co-present at national conferences, troubleshooting specific issues and providing individualized supervision.
- The Statewide Service Administrator has been actively involved in the development of the Department's Performance Improvement Plan.

The following will be areas of focus for the initiative this upcoming year:

- Continue integration into Area Office practice: The Statewide Service Administrator will continue to work with each consultant and Area Office to help determine how to best utilize their time and resources.
- Continue to support core competencies particularly the implementation of the domestic violence investigation protocol: The Statewide Service Administrator will continue to work with each consultant and the Area Offices on strategies for improving social workers' core competencies related to handling domestic violence in the context of child welfare cases.
- Participation in the implementation of the Integrated Family Violence Services: The Statewide Service Administrator will be providing technical assistance to support the implementation of Integrated Family Violence Services in six offices around the state. The Statewide Service Administrator will be helping coordinate the domestic violence consultants participation in the Area Office teams coordinating the new service.
- Domestic violence interdisciplinary training series: The Statewide Service Administrator will be hosting a series of events to help educate DCF staff and promote interdisciplinary communication. The topics may include trauma and children and the intersection between mental health and domestic violence. To improve coordination with community providers the Statewide Service Administrator is planning on hosting a "Safe and Together" event that would bring together community providers and DCF staff to discuss best practice approaches to working with families experiencing domestic violence.
- Continued training regarding advance training for supervisors and the exploration of the development of supervisors credential for domestic violence. This is in addition to making the Supervising DV training mandatory for all new supervisors.
- Increased Community Collaboration: The Statewide Service Administrator will be exploring how to support the increase the utilization across the state of MDTs for addressing serious domestic violence issues.
- Assess feasibility of implementing prevention education curriculum on dating violence for children in care: The Statewide Service Administrator will begin to explore options for providing education on dating violence to adolescents in care of the Department.
- Training for permanency workers: The Statewide Service Administrator will work with the Bureau of Child Welfare to develop targeted training for permanency workers. will lead to significantly increased risk for violence against the non-offending parent and critical incident.
- Statewide Service Administrator participation in the Connecticut Comprehensive Outcomes Reviews (CCOR) process.

